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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BUYER
MILITARY RECRUITING, RETENTION, AND RELATED PERSONNEL
PROGRAMS AND POLICIES
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE**

March 12, 1998

Today the Subcommittee on Military Personnel will turn its attention to the two programs that contribute directly to future combat readiness—recruiting and retention.

Today's hearing is almost one year to the day after the Subcommittee's hearing on this issue last year. At that time, the Subcommittee reported on the findings of an extensive staff examination of the change in attitudes within the force about making the military a career. The Subcommittee expressed great concern not only because these findings demonstrated that military quality of life had eroded over a wide range of programs, but also because they confirmed the damage that many of the members of this committee had feared would ultimately occur as the defense budget has been reduced.

During our hearing last year, we also reaffirmed our belief that recruiting is the most important peacetime mission because our ability to win on the battlefield in the future relies on our ability to recruit quality people today. Our concern about recruiting had been heightened at that time by Army decisions to reduce some quality objectives and a general awareness of a more challenging recruiting environment for all the services.

Although recruiting and retention has gone very well over the last decade, the Subcommittee, DOD, and others have long been concerned that the drawdown of forces has masked underlying recruiting and retention problems.

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I N D I A N A ' S 5 T H D I S T R I C T

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An assessment of today's environment gives little reason to be optimistic about the challenges facing recruiting and retention. A strong economy, increased accession requirements, reduced budgets, high operations tempo, caps on pay raises, and perceived reductions in the benefits package would normally spell trouble for both recruiting and retention.

This year, there is more evidence to suggest that our concerns about emerging recruiting and retention problems is well placed. This is not to say that we are in the midst of a crisis. But I believe the current situation can be fairly described as the leading edge of very serious problems.

For example, we now see the Army retrenching on recruiting funding and manpower increases that helped them survive 18 months of very problematic recruiting. The Navy is now taking the brunt of the challenging recruiting environment and may be up to 6,000 recruits behind their mission by May. In addition, the Navy is having trouble retaining both their officers and enlisted members. The Air Force is also experiencing a well defined problem with enlisted retention—in this case the second term NCO so critical to Air Force readiness. The Air Force pilot exodus is showing no signs of slowing despite the increase in the aviator bonus complemented by a broad range of initiatives designed to address aviator quality of life issues. The Marine Corps is holding its own in recruiting, but only after a \$5 million gift from the Commandant for advertising and a lot of hard work from Marine Corps recruiters. Also, the Marine Corps aviators have shown little interest in staying on at rates that will sustain the force.

The good news is that we can see all these trends clearly and we have time to address them. The bad news is the solutions are painful—both in terms of providing the funding and other resources and because sometimes the solution requires unpopular cultural changes.

My concern at this point centers on the reductions or at best straight line funding in the recruiting and retention accounts in the 1999 budget. The senior leaders who call the shots on funding within the services must not think the recruiting and retention problems are urgent because the message communicated to me by the 1999 budget is “let me know when it is breaks.”

This is not to suggest that funding is the only measure of effort. I know the services are working problems in many ways that are not connected to funding. However, based on past experience, I think it is fair to say that adequate resourcing is a critical component of successful recruiting and retention programs.

I would like to remind everyone that when General Edward C. “Shy” Meyer coined the phrase “hollow force” in the late 1970s, he was talking about people. People problems can develop quickly. And if not anticipated and addressed with equal speed, they can become problems that are very expensive and difficult to correct—if they can be corrected at all. Usually, once the damage is done, people shortages in the military are something we have to live with for years.

We will also have the opportunity during the hearing to examine some of the management challenges of the recruiting business that we have not focused on in the past. In this regard, we will follow up on the implementation of some recruiting initiatives included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998, and explore issues regarding command structure and recruiter goals. We also have the benefit of a series of recommendations from the Kassebaum-Baker Advisory Committee on Gender-Integrated Training and the General Accounting Office.